

WASHINGTON

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For HCRS use only

received

date entered

1. Name

historic The John W. Griffiths Mansion

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 3806 South Michigan Avenue

NH not for publication

city, town Chicago

N/A vicinity of

congressional district 1st

state Illinois

code 012

county

code 031

3. Classification

Category

district
 building(s)
 structure
 site
 object

Ownership

public
 private
 both

Public Acquisition

in process
 being considered
N/A

Status

occupied
 unoccupied
 work in progress

Accessibls

yes: restricted
 yes: unrestricted
 no

Present Use

agriculture
 commercial
 educational
 entertainment
 government
 industrial
 military
 museum
 park
 private residence
 religious
 scientific
 transportation
 other:

4. Owner of Property

name Margaret and Charles Burroughs

street & number 3806 South Michigan Avenue

city, town Chicago

N/A vicinity of

state Illinois

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Cook County Recorder of Deeds

street & number Cook County Building

city, town Chicago

state Illinois

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Inventory of Historic Structures
title in Chicago, Douglas

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date April, 1975

federal state county local

depository for survey records Illinois Department of Conservation

city, town Springfield

state Illinois

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

This structure is a large three (3) story limestone building with a full basement. Although the Griffiths house is predominately chateausque in design, it is possible that it is a reflection of the English Gothic style popularized throughout the nearby University of Chicago/Hyde Park neighborhood.

The slate roof is a composite of two (2) main hip roofs, intersected by dormer windows, cross gables and an octagonal tower with a conical roof. These intersecting elements are topped by gothic cross-shaped finials, while a large part of the roof is supported by brackets.

The main facade consists of three bays, with a central entrance and an octagonal tower to the northeast. This is vertically divided into levels by molded belt courses between the basement and the first floors and the first and second floors.

Some of the detail elements of the Chateau style are moderate stone corbeled brackets in series that support portions of the roofs. The windows are typical with their composition of a heavy stone transom bar between the transom above the main lower element of the window. The main entrance is formally framed by a basket-handle which transitions back to the plane of the double doors with "molded archivolts." The entire entrance is flanked by square pilasters rotated 90 degrees to expose a corner. The pilasters rise to form a point as they make the transition to a typical flat pilaster that becomes topped (and terminated) by a molded belt course of the second floor. The panel above the door entrance is decorated with intricate detailed carvings.

At the first floor, the entrance to the Griffith's house leads to an entrance vestibule followed by a central hall. The hallway is flanked to the right by a large open library, a grand staircase, and a toilet room. To the left of the hallway is a door leading into the drawing room, followed by another leading into the dining room. The drawing and dining rooms are separated by two sliding doors. To the rear of the main hall is a kitchen containing a butler's pantry.

There are many fine interior details which are primarily to be found on the first floor starting with the entrance vestibule and main lobby. Typically, a wainscot of oak panelling decorated in a simple rectilinear molding pattern is to be found in practically all rooms of the first floor.

Sliding wood doors are employed between the major spaces of the first floor. As in general character, the detailing is held to simple molded panels and subtle variations, such as using different wood on each side of the sliding doors between the middle and dining rooms.

The upper floors are large in accommodation, modest in detail with some elegant details employed in the master-bedroom quarters. There are alterations which date back to the days of the building's use by the Quincy Club. However, much of the building is in good to excellent repair with much of the original structure and detail intact.

A large fireplace dominates the north wall of the lobby between the northeast circular sitting alcove and the grand stair to the second floor. The fireplace front and hearth are faced in a red stone with brass trim molding framing the opening of the fireplace. The heavy mantle is of the typical oak with a generous treatment of molding in strata of descending order of intricacy. A leaded, stained glass window tops this element and is framed on each side with wood panelling in modestly executed detail.

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The ceiling is treated to a simple geometric pattern of timber beams that mirror the heavy wood molding at the perimeter of the ceiling. This ceiling treatment is utilized also in the dining room.

The dining room is the second most decorated room on this floor. The south wall is dominated by a large window that reflects the equally large break-front on the north wall with cupboards, drawers and counter-space. A large fireplace dominates the west wall and is topped by a mirror spanning the width of the mantle. The fireplace here is flanked by two pairs of classic columns supporting entablature and the mantle. Similar treatment is used at the fireplace of the middle room.

The grand stair is flanked by a continuation of the patterned wainscot on the north wall and a balustrade of scrolled posts on the south that starts and terminates with a square moderately decorated newel post.

8. Significance

Period	Area of Significance	Check and justify below		
prehistoric	archeology-prehistoric	community planning	landscape architecture	religion
1400-1499	archeology-historic	conservation	law	science
1500-1599	agriculture	economics	literature	sculpture
1600-1699	X architecture	X education	military	X social/
1700-1799	art	engineering	music	humanitarian
X 1800-1899	commerce	exploration/settlement	philosophy	theater
1900-	communications	industry	politics/government	transportation
		invention		other (specify)

Specific dates 1893-94 Builder/Architect Solon Beman

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The John Griffiths Mansion is one of the few remaining and salvageable residences of its era remaining in the near southside of Chicago between the famed former Gold Coast of Prairie Avenue and Hyde Park to the south. Mr. Griffiths was one of Chicago's and the country's more active and prominent contractors having executed many major structures around the United States. The structure has in the past housed the Quincy Club, a private club for Black railroad workers and was the first home to the "DuSable Museum of African-American History." The building is still primarily in its original form and continues to illustrate an architectural statement from a significant era in architecture in the region and the country.

BACKGROUND

John Griffiths was one of those "thoroughly self-made men" who engineered Chicago's spectacular transformation from regional metropolis to the nation's second city in the years following the Civil War. Born on a farm in Woodstock, Ontario, Griffiths served in his youth as a mason's apprentice; then, in 1869, moved to Chicago to seek his fortune.

He found it. First establishing himself as a contractor and builder in the surge of construction following the Great Fire of 1871, Griffiths achieved real prominence in the early 1890's when his firm was, in the words of a nineteenth century biographer, "entrusted with the erection" of such Chicago landmarks as the Grand Central Passenger station of 1890, John Wallborn Root's Chicago Hotel of 1891 (later known as the Great Northern), B.R. Ham and Root's Masonic Temple of 1892, and the Fine Arts Building at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. When it came time that year for Griffiths to build his own home, he chose a fashionable architect and an even more fashionable neighborhood.

Michigan Avenue had, along with Wabash, enjoyed a reputation as the South Side's most exclusive section in the 1840's and 1850's. But in the 1860's the tide of fashion moved southeastward to "the avenues"—Indiana, Prairie, and Calumet—and in the 1870's still further south and east to Grand and Drexel Boulevards. Then in 1880 Michigan Avenue itself was "boulevardized"—that is, widened, macadamized, and landscaped—and brought once again to the top of the social scale. By 1887 an anonymous British traveler could write:

The finest residential street of the city is Michigan Avenue...Grand residences are upon both sides of this avenue, which is the popular driveway. It is the 'Rotten Row' of Chicago, where all the elaborate turnouts go for an airing.

Translation? Chicago's newest boulevard had become a showcase not only for impressive houses on ornate grounds but for smart teams, liveried coachmen, expensive carriages and their elaborately costumed occupants as well—all the "fashionable consumption goods" that late-nineteenth century social custom associated with the well-to-do.

Architect Solon Beman was well aware of the symbolic value of horse and house: the ultra-fashionable Washington Park Race Track clubhouse, for example, was his work, as was

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W. W. Kimball's magnificent Prairie Avenue chateau. For Griffiths, Beman designed a less extravagant--and more typical--example of Chicago's "aristocratic residences" (so-called by realtors of the day to distinguish them from the merely "first-class"). True to type, it was of stone, free-standing, with a distinctive facade at the front, coachhouse and servants' quarters to the rear. As writer James Muirhead observed in 1898,

The houses in the Lake Shore Drive, the Michigan Boulevard, or the Drexel Boulevard are as varied in style as the brownstone mansions of New York are monotonous; they face on parks and are surrounded with gardens of their own; they are seldom ostentatiously large; they suggest comfort, but not offensive affluence; they make credible the possession of some individuality of taste on the part of their owners.

Today, fewer than a dozen such houses survive to tell this chapter of Michigan Avenue's history. Griffiths', in fact, was completed just as the neighborhood reached its zenith, for the Panic of 1893 marked the beginning of the end of the South Side as the leader of fashion. In the years that followed, light industry crept eastward along Thirty-ninth Street as automobile showrooms and residential hotels moved south along Michigan Avenue itself. Chicago's upper classes were drawn to new high-grade residential areas such as South Shore and Lake Shore Drive, and their old mansions were razed or converted to rooming houses. Chicago's Negro population, once confined to a narrow stretch of wooden houses west of State Street, expanded rapidly to the east. By the time of his death sometime in the mid-1930's, John Griffiths' home stood near the heart of the "Black Belt." In 1938 it was purchased by the members of the Quincy Club, a private club for black employees of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad.

It was a fitting new role for the elegant structure. Railroad porters (together with postal workers and headwaiters, among others) then constituted a black upper middle class just a cut below the elite of businessmen and professionals. Their social gatherings were lavish and frequent. But the public rooms of downtown hotels and clubs were closed to blacks. Even ordinary lodging was often impossible to obtain. Places like the Quincy Club filled a real need in the black community. Throughout the 1940's and 1950's Negro greats including W. E. B. DuBois and Paul Robeson were guests in its well-maintained rooms.

Then in 1961 the building began to serve an even wider community. That year, new owners Charles and Margaret Burroughs, together with a small group of educators, artists, and civil leaders founded the DuSable Museum of African and American History for the purpose of "preserving and disseminating the contributions of Africans and Afro-Americans to American and world culture." By the early 1970's its wide variety of programs attracted 30,000 visitors a year. In 1975 the museum was given a new, more spacious home in Washington Park, but the house at 3806 South Michigan--first black history museum outside of a college campus--remains an important annex.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Cook County Recorder of Deeds
Quincy Club Records

"Chicago Community Trust Newsletter," December, 1973. (See continuation sheet)

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property LESS THAN 1

Quadrangle name JACKSON PARK, IL - IND.

Quadrangle scale 1:24 000

UMT References

A

1	1	0
Zone	Easting	Northing

B

Zone	Easting	Northing

C

Zone	Easting	Northing

D

Zone	Easting	Northing

E

Zone	Easting	Northing

F

Zone	Easting	Northing

G

Zone	Easting	Northing

H

Zone	Easting	Northing

Verbal boundary description and justification Parcel 1-Lots 30 & 31 in Goldies Sub Division of North $\frac{1}{2}$ of South east $\frac{1}{4}$ of South west $\frac{1}{4}$ of South west, $\frac{1}{3}$ of Section 34, Township 39, North range 14, east of the third principal meridian in Cook County, Illinois. Parcel 2 a strip of land 5' in width lying east of and adjoining lots 30 & 31 and West of the west line of Michigan Ave.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state NA code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Dr. Margaret Burroughs (see continuation sheet)

organization The DuSable Museum date June 15, 1981

street & number 740 East 56th Place telephone 312/947-0600

city or town Chicago state Illinois

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature [Signature]

title Director, Ill. Dept. of Conservation date 9/25/81

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933. pp. 91-94, 133, 140, 178-179,
189-190, 304.

Mayer, Harold M. and Richard C. Wade. Chicago: Growth of a Metropolis.
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969. pp. 24, 56, 146, 232.

Pierce, Bessie Louise. As Others See Chicago: Impressions of Visitors, 1673-1932.
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933. pp. 232, 354.

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FORM PREPARED BY

name/title	Jeffrey Fleming and Andréa Urbas	
organization	Illinois Department of Conservation	
street/number	405 East Washington Street	telephone 217/782-0273
city or town	Springfield	state Illinois